

MECHANICS PROBLEMS IN WRITING FACED BY THE FOURTH SEMESTER STUDENTS OF THE ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to know the number of mechanics problem in writing short paragraph faced by the fourth semester students of English Education Study Program, Tadulako University. It was conducted because problem in writing especially in mechanics not only made by students in junior or senior high school level but also in university level. There were 15 students taken to be object of research through random sampling technique. Furthermore, the data collection used in this descriptive research was done by using two instruments: document and questionnaire. In this study, the researcher found 108 mechanics problem covering 28 punctuation problem, 65 capitalization problem,, and 15 spelling problem. It could be converted in percentage: 25.9% punctuation problem, 60.2% capitalization problem, and 13.9% spelling problem. Shortly, the most frequent problem was problem in capitalization.

Keywords: Writing; Short Paragraph; Mechanics

INTRODUCTION

Writing has an important role in communication. The role of writing is to accelerate information from one place to others. In addition, writing is also used to report news in newspapers and magazines. In addition, writing has a function to spread out scientific information in scientific writing. Bello (1997:1) defines, “Writing is a long lasting process of discovering how to find the most effective language for communicating one’s thought and feeling.” This quotation is also supported by Hampton’s statement (1999) which explains that writing skills are specific capabilities which help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful form or to mentally through the message.

Furthermore, the users of language write their ideas with some purposes as quoted in Hairston (1986:2) as follows:

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1. Writing is tool of discovery.
2. Writing generates new ideas by helping us to make connection and see relationship.
3. Writing helps us to organize our idea and clarify concept.
4. Writing down our ideas allows to distancing ourselves from them and evaluating them.
5. Writing helps us to absorb and process information: when we write about the topic, we learn it better.
6. Writing enables us to solve problem; by putting the elements of problems into written form, we can examine and manipulate them.
7. Writing on a subject makes us active rather than passive receivers of information.

Regarding to the quotation above, the researcher can say that writing has many functions. It can help the writer not only in finding and arranging the idea, but also in connecting the idea. Besides, writing is one of the language skills that has been integrated and taught to students not only in junior or senior high school but also in university level. In writing especially writing in education area, every student is free to write down their idea under the guidance of their teacher. Rivers and Temperley (1978:318) state,

Writing is expressive if it says what the students want to say in the situation, if writing is to be a natural self-directed activity, the students must have the choice between writing for practical purposes or creating a work for imagination.

In education area especially in English study program of Tadulako University, the students are taught Writing course consecutively from Writing I to Writing IV. The materials given are also different. They are taught from how to write a simple sentence, simple paragraph, into an essay. Writing can be instructed to the students using some aids such as pictures, diaries, letters, journals, and others in order to help them having ideas. As learning writing in senior high school, writing in this level is also integrated with other skills and language components. The students may learn writing through structure in which they are asked to write grammatical sentences. They also learn numerous vocabularies in reading skill with different topics before being asked to rewrite them. In brief, they are expected to increase numerous new words which can be used in writing.

Writing paragraph is a complex process even for students in university level. Learning to write is not like learning to speak because writing skill is not a naturally skill. Nunan (1988) states that writing is not a natural activity like speaking. Someone can speak by acquiring the language all the times. On the other hand, everyone cannot write if he/she is not taught how to make writing. In fact, the students are taught to make writing since junior

high school until university level. However, they are still difficult in making it. As a consequence, they get some problem in it.

Learning to write needs correct grammar to convey messages while learning to speak does not need it because speaking emphasizes interactive communication or understandable message, even though utterance does not have complete or correct grammar and good pronunciation. However, writing needs language skills and components. Someone can write a paragraph about what have been listened, spoken, or read. Wren and Martin (2001:1) state, “A paragraph is a number of sentences grouped together and relating to one topic or a group related sentences that develop one single point”. Writing also requires language components like grammar and punctuation. Haris (1969:68) argues, “In order to make a good writing, we need to recognize the component of writing skill such as content, forms, grammar, and mechanics”.

Because of the complexity in making writing, many students are difficult to write paragraphs even though they have learned writing for several years. In fact, most of the students get difficulty in constructing the good mechanics of writing whether punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Based on the result of research conducted by Fuad (2007) entitled “The Difficulties of Third Year students of English Education Study Program in Writing a Good Paragraph”, the interval percentage of problem in punctuation and capitalization was about 3%. It proved that the students in university level were still difficult in constructing the mechanics of writing. Relating to this case, the researcher is interested to investigate the mechanics problem of writing short paragraph encountered by fourth semester students of English Education Study Program, Tadulako University. The researcher wanted to know the number of mechanics problem not only problem in punctuation, mechanics, but also spelling.

METHODOLOGY

This research used a descriptive research which aimed to identify the mechanics problem in writing short paragraph faced by fourth semester students of English Education Study Program, Tadulako University. In the fourth semester students, there are five parallel classes: class A, B, C, D, and E. By using random sampling technique, the researcher made lottery to select 15 students from class B to be the object of this research.

The researcher used two instruments to collect the data such as document and questionnaire. Firstly, the test is used as the main data to identify the problem in writing

short paragraph. Then, the questionnaire is used as supporting data from test. Finally, the researcher took some quotations from some related books to support her opinion.

1) Document

The document was taken before distributing the questionnaire. The students were instructed to make a short paragraph based on the topic given. They wrote the paragraph by using correct punctuation, capital letters, and spelling.

2) Questionnaire

The researcher also gave questionnaire to the students to get the supporting data. She gave them kind of close questionnaire. The close questionnaire is questionnaire which contains of multiple choice questions. Then, she distributed the questionnaire to the students after giving the test. It consisted of five statements with three options per each item. The question in it was mainly about writing paragraph.

After doing data collection process, the researcher analyzed the data statistically while the questionnaire was analyzed descriptively. To determine the students' problem, she used the formula quoted from by Sudjono (1989:79) to get individual score as follows:

$$P = \frac{F}{n} \times 100$$

Where:

P = percentage of difficulty

F = frequency of students' incorrect answers

n= number of students answer

Then, to compute the mean score from each type of the test, the researcher used formula quoted by Arikunto (1993:220) as follows:

$$My = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

Where:

My = mean score

$\sum x$ = the sum of score

N = number of students

FINDINGS

In this research, the researcher collected the data by using two instruments: document and questionnaire. First of all, she took 15 students to be her participants and asked them to make a short paragraph. After that, she collected their writing. Then, in order to get supplying data, she distributed the questionnaire to all participants.

In this research, the researcher only investigated the mechanics problem, such as punctuation (P), capitalization (C), and spelling (S). It was because the scope of this research was only focused on these parts. In order to get the main data, she analyzed data collected. Before analyzing the data, she argued that all participants were not difficult in learning English because they have learned English frequently since first semester. It was also supported by the result questionnaire number 1 as in table 1.

Table 1

No. 1: I have difficulty in learning English when write short paragraph

No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1.	a. Strongly agree	0	0
	b. Agree	5	33.3
	c. Disagree	10	66.6
Total participants		15	100

Regarding to the table above, it can be seen 66.6% argued that they were not difficult in learning English. It could be concluded because they learnt English all days in all courses. Then, when the researcher analyzed their writing product, she found many mechanics problem. Its frequency can be seen in table 2.

Referring the result of data found in table 2, the researcher found that the highest frequent problem was capitalization usage. Then, it was followed by capitalization problem. The lowest frequent one was spelling problem. Shortly, she can say that most of participants did not aware if they were difficult in using mechanics. This statement was supported by the result of questionnaire number 4 as can be seen in table 4.

Table 2
Mechanics Problem Frequency

No.	Participants	Mechanics Problem			Frequency of Error
		P	C	S	
1.	DK	2	-	1	3
2.	IS	1	3	-	4
3.	MI	4	17	2	23
4.	Y	-	4	1	5
5.	N	2	-	-	2
6.	AN	3	3	-	6
7.	EN	1	1	-	2
8.	RDP	1	-	-	1
9.	A	1	2	-	3
10.	MU	3	8	4	15
11.	H	4	9	-	13
12.	U	1	14	2	17
13.	F	-	2	5	7
14.	RFA	3	-	-	3
15.	R	2	2	-	4
TOTAL		28	65	15	108

Regarding to result of problem counted in table 4.2, the researcher counted the mean problem by using formula: ($My = \sum x / N$). **My** stands for mean, $\sum x$ stands for total error from each category, and **N** refers to the number of students. The result can be seen in table 3.

Table 3
Mean of Mechanics Problem

No	Category	Total error	Mean ($My = \sum x / N$)
1.	Punctuation	28	1.9
2.	Capitalization	65	4.3
3.	Spelling	15	1
Number of students (N)		15	

Table 4

No. 4: I have difficulty to put capitalization in a short paragraph

No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage
4.	a. Strongly agree	12	80
	b. Agree	2	13.3
	c. Disagree	1	6.7
Total participants		15	100

The data in table 4 proved that 80% students strongly agree with the statement. This result was the same as the result of document. When the researcher analyzed their short paragraph, she found many problems in capitalization usage. Sometimes, they put capitalization wrongly or they did not capitalize the letter which should be written in capitalization.

The students had problem not only in punctuation, but also in the other components of mechanics: punctuation and spelling. Even though the problem in these parts were not higher than problem in capitalization, the researcher argued that all students had difficulty in these parts. In order to make this statement clear, she provided this statement with the result of questionnaire which can be seen in table 5 and 6.

Table 5

No. 3: I have difficulty to put punctuation in a short paragraph

No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage
3.	a. Strongly agree	1	6.7
	b. Agree	4	26.6
	c. Disagree	10	66.6
Total participants		15	100

Table 6
No. 5: I have difficulty in spelling English word

No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage
5.	a. Strongly agree	0	0
	b. Agree	8	53.3
	c. Disagree	7	46.7
Total participants		15	100

Furthermore, the researcher provided some examples of mechanics problem found in table 7. In this table, she put three examples for each category. As a result, there would be nine numbers put in it.

Table 7
Example of Mechanics Problem

No.	Incorrect	Correct
1.	She gets success in the film, (P)	She gets success in the film.
2.	“Lionel Andres Messi” (P)	Lionel Andres Messi
3.	–MY MOTHER- (P/C)	My Mother
4.	my mother is very protective of her children. (C)	My mother is very protective of her children.
5.	my friend is smart, but sometimes He lazy. (C)	My friend is smart, but sometimes he lazy.
6.	He is smart but Lazy. (C)	He is smart but lazy.
7.	She is a beautifull and hard worker. (S)	She is a beautiful and hard worker.
8.	She always gives a good advise. (S)	She always gives a good advice.
9.	She is a religious women. (S)	She is a religious woman.

There were some mechanics problem could be seen in table 7. For the first example, the students did not use full stop to end the sentence. For the next one, they use quotation mark to write the title. Next, they used hyphen to start and to end the title. Also, they wrote

all letters in this title by using capital letter. Then, capitalization problem occurred when they wrote the word in the beginning or in the middle of sentence. Finally, spelling problem was happened in writing the words which is often used, such as beautiful, advice, and woman. In conclusion, the researcher could say that the students were difficult in writing short paragraph but half students did not realize it. It can be seen in table 8.

Table 8

No. 2: I have difficulty to make a good sentence when writing short paragraph

No.	Options	Frequency	Percentage
2.	a. Strongly agree	1	6.7
	b. Agree	6	40
	c. Disagree	8	53.3
Total participants		15	100

DISCUSSION

The researcher investigated three items such as problem in using punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. In this research, she focused on writing short paragraph. By looking at the total problem found, the researcher decided that capitalization problem was the higher frequent problem. The percentage of capitalization problem was 60.2%. It was followed by punctuation problem which had percentage 25.9%. Then, the lowest one was spelling problem with percentage 13.9%. The result of document showed that capitalization was the most frequent one and it was supported by the result of questionnaire. In questionnaire result, most of the students argued that the most difficult part of writing was capitalization.

Referring to the result found from the previous study conducted by Fuad (2012), the researcher found a difference between the recent finding and the previous finding. In the recent finding, capitalization problem was higher than punctuation one. The capitalization problem was 60.2% and punctuation problem was 25.9%. In contrast, the previous researcher found that percentage of punctuation problem was higher than capitalization. The punctuation problem was 33.3% and capitalization one was 30.65%. Shortly, the researcher concluded that the previous finding and the recent finding were different based on the total error found.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The researcher would like to make a conclusion based on the research question. Based on the research finding, she argued that there were 108 mechanics problem found including 28 punctuation problem, 65 capitalization problem, and 15 spelling problem. If it converted into percentage there would be 25.9% punctuation problem, 60.2% capitalization problem, and 13.9% spelling problem. Shortly, the most frequent one was capitalization problem.

Having identified the students' mechanics problem in writing a short paragraph, the researcher would like to give some advices for the lecturer and students themselves. Firstly, the lecturer should pay attention to the students' way in constructing mechanics of writing and give them many writing short paragraph exercises. Secondly, for the students, it would be better if they learn seriously especially in using capitalization and punctuation and devote more attention to the teacher's explanation in writing especially writing short paragraph by using mechanics properly.

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